

# Digging up the Past: Space, Time, and Memory in Josef Haslinger's "Fiona und Ferdinand"

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## 1. Introduction

In the study *A Fortunate Man* (1967), John Berger calls landscape “less a setting for the life of its inhabitants than a curtain behind which their struggles, achievements and accidents take place” (13). The landscape as Berger imagines it is at once dimensional, experiential, and temporal. In Josef Haslinger's “Fiona und Ferdinand” (2006), space, time, and memory are constructed in ways similar to Berger's conception. Spaces are realized as temporal phenomena, and vice versa; time is also manifested in spatial terms. In other words, the notion of the “past” in Haslinger's text is configured both temporally and spatially, as moment(s) in elapsed time, but also, as I will discuss in this article, as a layer in the strata of the lived landscape. “Fiona und Ferdinand” considers several iterations of space: as a site of memory; as a lived, gendered place; and as the human body, itself a site where struggle is located, but also an entity that inhabits specific and coded places relative to its sociopolitical and historical context. Haslinger questions how spaces, either abstract or physical, function as containers for repressed memory. Further, in the dual settings of the text – one revealed through remembered story, the other in the narrative present – he explores how phenomena such as war, trauma, remembering, and forgetting imprint themselves upon contemporary notions of personal and collective identity. In what follows, I examine Haslinger's representation of “officially sanctioned” memory and where it resides within a lived landscape in which past and present co-exist. Second, I investigate other notions of place, manifested as either the subjugated female body or the decaying skeletons Fiona and Ferdinand, and explore how bodies, either as-place or in-place, inform postwar discussions of gender, history, and memory. Last, I consider the abiding processes of forgetting and denial, not only as they appear in “Fiona und Ferdinand,” but also as an enduring theme throughout Haslinger's oeuvre.<sup>1</sup>

1 Haslinger is popularly known for his literary fiction, but has also published several essays

For the sake of clarity, I include here a brief synopsis of the story. The (unnamed) narrator – whose life parallels Haslinger’s in several ways – is summoned to his boyhood village in Austria by his mother after the death of Old Bachmaier, father of the narrator’s childhood friend Franz.<sup>2</sup> Before Bachmaier’s burial, several bones are discovered in a chest in his bedroom; Franz indicates that these bones are in fact the same as those that he and the narrator unearthed, playing decades earlier in the Bachmaier fields, and named Fiona and Ferdinand. Frau Gutwenger, one of the village elders, is inconsolable after the bones are discovered, and the narrator’s mother concludes that Gutwenger’s hysteria, coupled with the discovery of the bones, has something to do with the murder of Elisabeth Graf that took place years before during the postwar *Russenzeit*. While the narrator tramples cabbage in a large tub for a Sauerkraut dinner, his mother tells him the story of the Bachmaier brothers, who were obsessed with Elisabeth in their youth and aggressively competed for her affection. One evening, the young Frau Gutwenger witnessed two “Russian” soldiers – one of whom limped – drag Elisabeth to a field, where they raped and murdered her. Years later, Gutwenger, while not explicitly implicating old Bachmaier and his brother

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collections which evidence his engagement with political and aesthetic criticism. *Politik der Gefühle* (1987) directly addresses the 1986 Waldheim Affair in Austria, and uses the scandal as a springboard for a larger discussion of Austrian politics and *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*. *Klasse Burschen* (2001) similarly explores Austrian history and the arguable failures of its social democracy, and *Rotweissbuch* (1988), a collection edited by Haslinger, reflects on the state of Austrian politics fifty years after the *Anschluss*. Moreover, Haslinger, who has spent considerable time in the United States in both a recreational and professional capacity, compiled the collection *Das Elend Amerikas: Elf Versuche über ein gelobtes Land* (1992), which revealed the splintering of American dominance following the Gulf War and examined several facets of popular culture in the U.S. His text *Hausdurchsuchung im Elfenbeinturm* (1996) considers the roles and responsibilities of writers and examines their elevated status in society, while *Wozu brauchen wir Atlantis?* (1990) discusses, among other ideas, the state of contemporary Austrian literature vis-à-vis established literary traditions and genres. Haslinger originally wrote the essay *Am Ende der Sprachkultur? über das Schicksal von Schreiben, Sprechen, und Lesen* for the *Wiener Vorlesungen* forum in 2003. With its emphasis on cultural criticism and questions about the usage and future of language, Haslinger’s text launched the *Karl Kraus Vorlesungen zur Kulturkritik*, a new addition in the *Wiener Vorlesungen* series of publications. Last, in *Wie werde ich ein verdammter guter Schriftsteller?* (2005) and *Schreiben lernen - Schreiben lehren* (2006) Haslinger, together with Hans-Ulrich Treichel, discuss their philosophies vis-à-vis the teaching and discussion of creative writing, experiences that were largely influenced by their respective tenures at the Deutsches Literaturinstitut Leipzig (where both continue to teach at the time of this writing).

- 2 Kristina Werndl calls the narrator in “Fiona und Ferdinand” Haslinger’s “literarisches Alter Ego,” and indeed, several features of the narrator’s autobiography parallel Haslinger’s. The narrator departs for his mother’s house from Leipzig where he teaches, and his childhood home is in the Austrian *Waldviertel* (Haslinger was born and raised in Zwettl).

in Elisabeth Graf's murder, finds it suspicious that both Bachmaier and the "Russian" soldier who killed Elisabeth walked with a limp. Much to the narrator's surprise, his mother responds to this revelation indifferently, and refuses to investigate Gutwenger's story. She indicates that Bachmaier is indeed possibly guilty, but prefers to adhere to the long-held narrative of the Russian perpetrators in order to maintain peace in her village. The narrator, frustrated at the ambiguity and lack of resolution surrounding Elisabeth's death, takes leave from his mother and returns to his home in Leipzig.

## **2. Landscapes of Space and Time**

Like several of Haslinger's works, including *Das Vaterspiel* (2000) and *Der Tod des Kleinhäuslers Ignaz Hajek* (1985), the narrative in "Fiona und Ferdinand" is initiated by a phone call: "am tag des bachmaier-begräbnisses fand ich auf dem anrufbeantworter zwei nachrichten meiner mutter vor. in der ersten bat sie mich zurückzurufen, in der zweiten sagte sie: im dorf geht es drunter und drüber. du musst kommen" (39).<sup>3</sup> In this, and other stories by Haslinger, the protagonist is summoned by a female character from his past via some kind of messaging technology (telephone, telegram, etc.), undertakes a journey, and, once arrived at his destination, questions and ultimately uncovers revelations – either personal or collective – about the past. Time and space are interwoven in "Fiona und Ferdinand," with Haslinger's narrator moving toward a personally meaningful place that, once reached, compels him to circle back and look toward the past. Further, space and time are distorted in these texts by Haslinger, per the Marxian notion of the "annihilation of space by time" (Massey 146) or David Harvey's theory of time-space compression. Both suggest that technologies such as the railroad, telegraph, industrialized factory, telephone, and Internet conquer spatial distance.<sup>4</sup> Though he was

3 Ignaz Hajek is called home by way of a telegram: "Der Telegrammbote war längst fort ... Josef Hajek blieb nicht viel Zeit. Er stopfte ein paar Sachen in einen Seesack aus blauem Kunstleder ... und trat in den Hof hinaus" (9). In *Das Vaterspiel*, Rupert Kramer is summoned to Long Island from Vienna when his college girlfriend Mimi calls him on the telephone. She reveals upon his arrival in the U.S. that he will help her hide her great-uncle Lucas, a Lithuanian war criminal, in her grandmother's basement: "So waren die Jahre dahingegangen. Aber dann hat Mimi angerufen und ich war losgefahren" (10).

4 Referencing Stephen Kern's *The Culture of Time and Space, 1880–1918*, Harvey writes, "the telephone, wireless-telegraph, X-ray, cinema, bicycle, automobile and airplane established the material foundation' for new modes of thinking about and experiencing time and space" (265). He goes on to give several concrete examples of the new relationships between space and time: "Ford, we recall, set up his assembly line in 1913. He fragmented tasks and distributed them in space so as to maximize efficiency and minimize the

not the first to speak specifically to the “annihilation” of space through time, Marx’s conception of the relationship between the two was foregrounded in his existing philosophies vis-à-vis capitalist production in the age of industrialization. Harvey’s notion of time–space compression is similarly lodged in theories of capitalism and increasing internationalization. There are, however, other dimensions of time–space compression to be considered, ranging from racial to gendered to aesthetic.<sup>5</sup> For the purposes of this study, I will refer to the most general description of time–space compression, which, according to Harvey’s formulation of it, is the fundamental process “that so revolutionize[s] the objective qualities of space and time that we are forced to alter ... how we represent the world to ourselves” (Harvey 240). In other words, time–space compression is a phenomenon that changes the relationship(s) governing space and time.

But back to that phone call. Heidi Nast and Steve Pile posit in *Places through the Body* that, “the telephone [creates] closeness only to invert it into distance – a sign of distance away from someone” (407). Distance in “Fiona und Ferdinand” is imagined in both spatial and mnemonic terms, and, as Nast and Pile suggest, designates both a movement toward and away from something. The call from mother at the outset of “Fiona und Ferdinand” whisks the narrator away from present time and space, and sets the stage

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friction of flow in production. In effect, he used a certain form of spatial organization to accelerate the turnover time of capital in production. Time could then be accelerated (speed-up) by virtue of the control established through organizing and fragmenting the spatial order of production. In that very same year, however, the first radio signal was beamed around the world from the Eiffel tower, thus emphasizing the capacity to collapse space into the simultaneity of an instant in universal public time. The power of wireless had been clearly demonstrated the year before with the rapid diffusion of news about the sinking of the *Titanic* (itself a symbol of speed and mass motion that came to grief in much the same way that the *Herald of Free Enterprise* was to keel over to speedy disaster some seventy-five years later). Public time was becoming ever more homogenous and universal across space. And it was not only commerce and railways, for the organization of large-scale commuting systems and all the other temporal coordinations that made metropolitan life bearable also depended upon establishing some universal and commonly accepted sense of time. The more than 38 billion telephone calls made in the United States in 1914 emphasized the power of intervention of public time and space in daily and private life. Indeed, it was only in terms of such a public space of time that reference to private time could make sense. De Chirico appropriately celebrated these qualities by conspicuously placing clocks (an unusual gesture in art history) in his paintings of 1910–14” (266–267).

- 5 Doreen Massey discusses this phenomenon in gendered and racial terms (148), while Rebecca Solnit considers the role of photography and motion pictures in our understanding of time and space: “motion pictures changed the relationship to time farther; they made it possible to step in the same river twice, to see not just images but events that had happened in other times and other places, almost to stop living where you were and start living in other places or other times” (6).

for additional textual manipulations of both. Connected to his mother via the telephone, the narrator makes his pilgrimage home, but once there, finds himself increasingly distanced from any clear understanding of the past. Haslinger uses the telephone as a signifier to indicate the unconventional treatment of time and space in "Fiona und Ferdinand." Time does not "flow" in the traditional conception of linear temporal movement, but rather freezes, moves backwards, and folds in upon itself. Space is similarly complicated and emerges in several iterations: as an amalgam of past moments, as a container for the disempowered, and more specifically, as the manifestation of the body-as-place, the site of struggle.<sup>6</sup>

If the telephone manipulates space and compels Haslinger's narrator to move through it, then his homecoming forces him to renegotiate space and time and consider their relationship to memory in still other ways. Eviatar Zerubavel argues in *Time Maps* (2003) that pilgrimages like the one the narrator undertakes are "specifically designed to bring mnemonic communities into closer 'contact' with their collective past" (42). Indeed, the narrator accesses the collective past by returning home, but the residues of trauma and transgression he encounters there ultimately culminate in a still greater distance from clarity or understanding at the end of the text. Zerubavel conceives of time in spatial terms, suggesting that "the present is largely a cumulative, multilayered collage of past residues continually deposited through the cultural equivalent of the geological process of sedimentation" (37). The past is thus inescapable, according to Zerubavel, since it is ubiquitous, with the present merely layered upon it. As a child, the narrator quite literally dug up the past when he and Franz Bachmaier unearthed two skeletons in the Bachmeier fields. In the narrative present, he continues his excavation, probing memory for truths about his fellow townspeople, his mother, and correspondingly, about himself. Doreen Massey writes that "the identity of place ... is always and continuously being produced. Instead of looking back with nostalgia to some identity of place which it is assumed already exists, the past has to be constructed" (171). Similarly, Michael Roth (1995) suggests that, "memory, like history, is always constructed in or is in response to the present ... any particular recounting of the past may well be a violation of someone else's memory of it" (9). Both statements underscore the processual nature of memory *in situ*, and its relativism *vis-à-vis* present time and present narrator. In "Fiona und Ferdinand," the past is constructed and reconstructed

6 Carl Niekerk's article "Image, Sound, and Text: Aesthetic Education in the Age of New Media in Josef Haslinger's *Das Vaterspiel* (2000)" further explores how the usage of different media by different generations and demographic groups in Haslinger's *Das Vaterspiel* "articulates a clash between history mediated in the form of texts [...] and [information imparted by] sounds and images" (23).

in a willful act of resistance to memory. The narrator's mother, who refuses to endorse Frau Gutwenger's probable and incriminating eyewitness account of Elisabeth Graf's murder, constructs a dubious version of the past in order to maintain peace in her community in present time.

### 3. "Stuck" Storytelling in "Fiona und Ferdinand"

One of the containers of collective memory is the oral story, a vehicle for the transmission of memory to subsequent generations. In "The Storyteller" (2006), Benjamin highlights the transmissive nature of memory, which "creates the chain of tradition which passes a happening on from generation to generation" (371), and Judith Herman, in her writings on trauma, suggests that memory is essentially "the action of telling a story" (1997, 37). In "Fiona und Ferdinand" memory is largely imparted through the story that unfolds via the narrator's mother. Curiously, however, her storytelling is not a revelatory exercise, but rather an obfuscatory one which perpetuates a revisionist version of history. The story told by mother develops while the narrator presses cabbage for Sauerkraut with his feet in a large vat.<sup>7</sup> For millennia, movement – and specifically walking – have been paired with storytelling: the mind awakens via physical motion; unfolding human thought mirrors the unfolding landscape underfoot. Relatedly, Rebecca Solnit (2003) refers to the mind as a landscape and suggests that walking is one way to traverse mental space (6). She points to documentation of the walking-speaking relationship throughout time: in antiquity, "austerely draped men speaking gravely ... pace through a dry Mediterranean landscape"; Rousseau remarked in his *Confessions*, "I can only meditate when I am walking. When I stop, I cease to think, my mind only works with my legs" (14).<sup>8</sup> Solnit tells us that "walking is a bodily labor that produces nothing but thoughts, experiences, arrivals" (6). But the "arrivals" that are part of Solnit's walking experience don't appear for the narrator in "Fiona und Ferdinand." Indeed, he never really

7 This scene re-emphasizes the manipulation of space and time in "Fiona und Ferdinand." The narrator's cabbage-pressing returns him to his childhood, as evidenced in the exchange between him and his mother:

sie sagte, wenn du willst, kannst du dir gleich die füsse waschen und sauerkraut treten.

du machst witze.

warum? du hast doch als kind immer so gerne sauerkraut getreten.

pass ich da überhaupt noch rein? fragte ich.

ich habe extra ein breites schaff genommen, sagte sie. (48)

8 For another study of the meditative dimensions of walking, see Frederic Gros' *A Philosophy of Walking* (2014).

arrives at anything as he plods around his Sauerkraut tub. His "walking" in the cabbage-vat metaphorizes his mother's kind of storytelling: rather than unfolding linearly and toward a resolution, her version of memory is circular and cyclical, never developing, always returning to the past, forever escaping self-recognition or self-realization. Doris Lessing, remembering her own father's trauma after losing a leg in World War One, wrote about a similar experience of "stuck" memory: "His childhood and young man's memories kept fluid, were added to, grew, as living memories do. But his war memories were congealed in stories that he told again and again, with the same words and gestures, in stereotyped phrases" (Herman 38). Like Lessing's father, the narrator's mother in "Fiona und Ferdinand," along with her fellow townspeople, is trapped paradoxically inside the interminable orbit of what historian Jay Winter calls "traumatic memory:" she acknowledges the existence of past trauma, but refuses to examine it. Winter details the personal and societal dangers of unleashing this kind of memory: "traumatic memory was subversive ... [it] could wreck lives and families. Its evident and troubling existence undermined more comforting or officially sanctioned memories" (387–388). Like Lessing, he emphasizes the relationship between storytelling, stuck memory, and trauma:

When we encounter family stories about war in this century, we frequently confront another kind of storytelling, one we have come to call traumatic memory [...] I take this term to signify an underground river of recollection, first discussed in the aftermath of World War I, but a subject of increasing attention in the 1980s and 1990s, when posttraumatic stress disorder became the umbrella term for those (as it were) stuck in the past. (384)

Winter uses spatial terms to describe memory that resemble Zerubavel's notion of the present as a multilayered assemblage of past residues. In the quote above, memory is an "underground river of collection;" elsewhere, Winter posits that the memories of men and women postwar were "not on the surface, but underground" (385). Memory is thus something that inhabits different spaces in different ways. Socially accepted memories exist openly, while traumatic memory is relegated to hidden space. As I will discuss later in this article, the unspoken and general consensus to adhere to officially sanctioned memory, and the insistent placement of that choreographed memory within the public, lead to a tradition of willful forgetting in "Fiona und Ferdinand."

#### 4. Bodies

In a consideration of space and time in “Fiona und Ferdinand,” it behooves one to examine not just the physical geographies of the narrator’s hometown, but also the bodies located there. Indeed, Haslinger uses bodies in several iterations, either alongside the lived landscape, or in opposition to it, to further explore memory and trauma. Gillian Rose calls the lived body “the geography closest in” (Rose 2), while Nast and Pile term it “the site of struggle” (3). The body is thus another place on which meaningful events are inscribed and imposed. Further, Rose speaks of the body as being placed “geopolitically,” with history, politics, memory, and geography all imprinting themselves upon it (3). In various ways, the bodies in “Fiona und Ferdinand” represent all these things: in life, bodies – and female bodies in particular – are situated as locations for gendered struggles, while in death, the decaying, skeletal body operates as a relic that triggers alternating processes of remembering and forgetting. Further, many of the bodies in “Fiona und Ferdinand” are broken, ruined, or violated within the political or geographical landscapes where they are situated, suggesting that place, even in the most intimate embodiment of the physical self, is fraught and unstable. Though there are many bodies to consider in Haslinger’s text, two iterations of the “body” stand out in particular: first, the female body and its corresponding exclusion from public space; and second, the pair of skeletons unearthed by the narrator and his friend Franz in their childhood, and christened by the boys as “Fiona und Ferdinand.”<sup>9</sup> In the discussion that follows, I will consider the ways that Haslinger presents the body, both within space and as a space unto itself, and how he further extrapolates the conception of the body in a far-reaching consideration of memory and identity.

##### 4.1 Locating the Female Body

Bodies in “Fiona und Ferdinand” are gendered and politicized, and the female body is a particular location where conflicts of autonomy and memory are situated. The (female) body as place experiences the infliction of physical violation, while its movement through space is controlled in still other ways. Massey writes that,

9 This is not the first time that Haslinger has used the motif of the skeleton in his writings. In *Opernball*, it was the finger bone found in the *Karlsplatz* station that directed police chief Amon to the presence of an underground neo-Nazi organization. Here, the double discovery of bones – first, in the narrator’s childhood, and then again in Old Bachmaier’s chest – twice escalates the narrative (42).

The limitations of women's mobility in terms of both identity and space has been in some cultural contexts a crucial means of subordination. Moreover the two things – limitation on mobility in space, the attempted consignment/confinement to particular places on the one hand, and the limitation on identity on the other – have been crucially related. (179)

Using Elisabeth Graf as a first example, we see that women's bodies, both as places themselves, and how these bodies inhabit domestic spaces in particular, foreground a larger discussion about gendered spaces and social rules in the Austrian setting of Haslinger's story. Elisabeth, according to the narrator's mother, was "einfach die beste ... ich bin ja mit ihr zur schule gegangen" (51). She was also the unfortunate love interest of the Bachmaier brothers, who became "benommene gockel" in her presence (49), sparring with each other for her affections, and intimidating her to the point that she was condemned to a sort of house arrest:

keiner von ihnen war in der lage, mit ihr ein vernünftiges wort zu reden, aber seltsamerweise wollten beide sie unbedingt haben. der eine hat geprahlt: die elisabeth will mich heute nacht an ihrem fenster sehen, der andere hat zurückgegeben: was glaubst du, mit wem ich heute im wald zusammen war? für uns war es eigentlich lustig, den beiden zuzuhören. nur für elisabeth war das nicht lustig. sie hat damals bei ihren eltern im schulhaus gewohnt. vor den bachmaier-brüdern hat sie so große angst gehabt, dass sie das haus nur am sonntag verlassen hat, wenn sie mit ihren eltern zur kirche gegangen ist. (50)

In these few lines, Haslinger accentuates several iterations of the body, either in-place or as-place. First, Elisabeth is manifested as an object, not of the brothers' affection, but of their competition. The narrator's mother concedes that neither of the brothers "war in der lage, mit [Elisabeth] ein vernünftiges wort zu reden" and admits that it was strange that either was interested in her in the first place (49). Elisabeth is thus rendered as signifier, robbed of identity and secondary to the brothers' relationship with each other. Second, mother remembers Elisabeth's "courtship" as simultaneously traumatic (for Elisabeth) and entertaining (for everyone else). The townspeople, also conceiving of Elisabeth as an object to be enjoyed, delight in observing as she is terrorized. Last, Elisabeth's restricted movement informs Haslinger's thesis of gendered space in "Fiona und Ferdinand." According to Massey, "women's mobility ... is restricted – in a thousand different ways, from physical violence to being ogled at or made to feel simply 'out of place' – not by capital, but by men" (148). Her emphasis on the placelessness of female experience resonates in this discussion of "Fiona und Ferdinand," where not just Elisabeth, but several other women, are rendered either "out of place," or relegated to very specific places. Further, Haslinger reverses the popular gendered narrative

of wartime suffering in “Fiona und Ferdinand,” suggesting that the onset of war, and the resulting absence of men, liberates women like Elisabeth from spatial limitations. In the absence of the Bachmaier brothers, Elisabeth is granted a reprieve from her domestic imprisonment: “der jüngere, der vater meines schulfreundes franz, hatte dem älteren versprechen müssen, elisabeth in ruhe zu lassen, so lange er im krieg sei. als ein jahr darauf der jüngere zum russlandfeldzug aufbrach, konnte elisabeth das haus wieder verlassen” (51). Elisabeth’s freedom of movement during war underscores the loosening of social structures for women on the home front. Though she does not write explicitly about homebound soldiers, Massey uses the example of coal miners in Britain as a foundation for her discussion on gendered relationships within certain spaces. Coal mining and war fighting are not analogous, but they are nonetheless predominantly male experiences that can be examined together, if we consider her characterizations: all the coal miners in her study are male; mining was “dirty, dangerous, and hazardous” for them; they “risked their lives” at work. Identity among the coal miners was consequently influenced through the “shared risks” of the job, contributing to a “particular form of male solidarity” (Massey 193). Once returned to the domestic space, however, men “reacted to [their own] exploitation by fighting ... as a gender group against women – or rather within a framework of sex solidarity against a specific woman chosen and caged for this purpose” (194). Elisabeth Graf, locked in her home, and, as we will come to see, young Frau Gutwenger, too, are thus further objectified if we consider Massey’s notion of space, and how men and women occupy it differently. Not only are female bodies in constant danger of violation, but, within the domestic “cage,” they also become a static and inseparable feature of the home, where their bodies exist as sites on which struggles of space and gender are waged.

The witnessing of Elisabeth’s murder by Frau Gutwenger presents the reader with yet another complicated constellation of spatial relationships. As the narrator’s mother tells it, Frau Gutwenger was locked in a hidden attic space during the postwar *Russenzeit* for her own protection against marauding Russian soldiers, similar to Elisabeth’s captivity during her harassment by the Bachmaier brothers. Gutwenger’s imprisonment lasted for several months, and, in need of some distraction, she loosened a shingle in the attic roof, creating a hole through which she could view the adjacent cornfield and forest (53). It is through this hole that she alone bore witness to Elisabeth’s final moments in the cornfield with the two “Russian” soldiers who raped and murdered her:

es war gegen abend, da sah sie, wie die elisabeth von zwei russischen soldaten ins kornfeld gezerrt und dort zu boden geworfen wurde. die gutwengerin hat mir das alles erzählt. sie sagt, sie hat zum himmel gefleht, dass die russen

aufhören mögen. die soldaten haben elisabeth den mund zugehalten. als sie danach fortgingen, hat die elisabeth einen fehler gemacht. sie hat ihnen nachgerufen. ich habe euch doch nichts getan! die gutwengerin sagt, sie hat es deutlich hören können. ich habe euch doch nichts getan. (54)<sup>10</sup>

Like Elisabeth, Frau Gutwenger is imagined as object, a thing to be possessed by the invading Russians, secondary to the Austrian soldier and with her own meaning derived only in relation to him. As Susan Brownmiller wrote in her seminal work *Against Our Will: Men, Women, and Rape*, "Rape is the act of a conqueror," with, "access to a woman's body ... an actual reward of war" (35). To the outside world, Gutwenger is a spoil of war whose autonomy is determined by the corresponding loss or victory of the (male) military. Because even the private sphere of the home is threatened by rogue Russian soldiers, Gutwenger contains herself in hidden space. In his discussion of Foucault, who "noted the organic connection between spatial concepts and micro-physics of power" (Watts 117), Michael Watts argues that certain spaces are "container[s] of power ... the means by which subjects [are] incarcerated, disciplined, and imprisoned within spaces of social control" (117). Indeed, Gutwenger's *Versteckt* is the embodiment of the Foucauldian construction of power-space relationships. Following from his conception of space, her hideout is a heterotopia, a meaning-laden space "outside of all places" (4).<sup>11</sup> The attic simultaneously exists and does not exist – only she and her father know of its presence – and so upon entering the secret space, her identity ceases to exist as well. Sisters Susan Bordo, Binnie Klein, and Marilyn K. Silverman together discuss domestic space vis-à-vis their mother in the collaborative essay *Missing Kitchens*.

- 10 Keeping Haslinger's consideration of storytelling in mind, it is tempting to compare the placement of murdered Elisabeth Graf in the field with Benjamin's conception of the subject in *The Storyteller*. In the following passage, Benjamin also notes implications of the First World War and advancing technologies for communication in the modern era: "Was it not noticeable at the end of the war that men returned from the battlefield grown silent - not richer but poorer in communicable experience? What ten years later was poured out in the flood of war books was anything but experience that goes from mouth to mouth. And there was nothing remarkable about that. For never has experience been contradicted more thoroughly, than strategic experience by tactical warfare, economic experience by inflation, bodily experience by mechanical warfare, moral experience by those in power. *A generation that had gone to school on a horse-drawn streetcar now stood under the open sky, in a countryside in which nothing remained unchanged but the clouds, and beneath these clouds, in a field of force of destructive torrents and explosions, was the tiny, fragile human body*" (362, italics inserted for emphasis).
- 11 Foucault's "fifth principle" of heterotopias comments on notions of spatial accessibility and visibility: "Heterotopias always presuppose a system of opening and closing that both isolates them and makes them penetrable. In general, the heterotopic site is not freely accessible like a public place. Either the entry is compulsory, as in the case of entering a barracks or a prison, or else the individual has to submit to rites and purifications" (7).

Like several of the female characters in “Fiona und Ferdinand,” their mother was inseparable from the home, and more specifically, the feminized space of the kitchen. Klein writes, “if mother is of the kitchen, and the kitchens are missing, then mother is missing” (Bordo, Klein, and Silverman 78). Similar to Gutwenger, Klein’s mother’s existence is realized only through habitable space. When the kitchen – or the attic in “Fiona und Ferdinand” – cannot be located and thus ceases to exist, the inhabitant(s) within cease to exist as well. Gutwenger’s autonomy is diminished, first by way of unequal gender structures, and second by her objecthood as war trophy, with her imprisonment an extreme version of Elisabeth Graf’s, manifested in the wholesale denial of her personhood.

Women in “Fiona und Ferdinand” are characterized by either their relegation to specific spaces (usually domestic), a complete physical absence, or some combination of the two. Frau Gutwenger and Elisabeth are principal examples of women imprisoned in space, but the narrator’s mother and Elisabeth’s mother “die Gräfin” are also emblems of this theme. The narrator’s mother is introduced, dwells, and seems to only exist, in her house. In fact, she possesses hardly any defining characteristics at all, save for a passing description by her son, who depicts her only in relation to the home she occupies: “meine mutter bewohnte ein kleines häuschen neben dem bauernhof, in dem sie sich ein lebtage lang abgerackert hatte” (48). Massey aligns women with the home in spatial terms, suggesting that the woman is static and constant: “home is where the heart is ... and where the woman is also. [For young lads coming home from war, mum was not a] living person engaged in toils and troubles and pleasures of life, not actively engaged in her own and others’ history, but a stable symbolic centre” (180). In “Fiona und Ferdinand,” mother is defined not only in relation to the home, but also in contrast with her son. His presence is defined by movement and journey, while she emblemizes permanence and stasis, having lived a “*lebtage*” in her home. Further, and following from Heidegger, Harvey makes home the spatial manifestation of memory (217). If woman’s place is the home, then she also occupies the spaces where memory is contained. Meanwhile, die Gräfin is a presence so insignificant that she does not even occupy space in the narrator’s imagination: “von der gräfin konnte ich mir kein klares bild in erinnerung rufen” (41). This mnemonic failure distinctly contrasts with his clear memories of “der Graf,” whom he can still describe in precise detail. Women, whether bearers of memory through story (narrator’s mother), witness to trauma (Gutwenger), or themselves bodies on which struggles are inscribed and remembered (Elisabeth and Gutwenger in her youth) are shut away, controlled within space, or forgotten altogether. The relegation of women to hidden lived space and their corresponding absence in the space of

others' imaginations is aligned with the spatial notions of memory and time posited by Zerubavel and Winter. Traumatic memory, as Winter posits, exists underground but never really disappears; it is always just below the surface of present time. Similarly, as messengers and emblems of memory, women are at once omnipresent and almost entirely absent "Fiona und Ferdinand."

#### 4.2 *Bodies in Decay*

The bodies in "Fiona und Ferdinand." are in crisis: either endangered and displaced, or deteriorating and dead, and Haslinger repeatedly describes bodies in the process of decay. Old Bachmaier had a "hals [der] bei lebendigem leib verfault war" (39) and wheezed terribly through a hole in his throat; the Gräfin is found dead as a rotting corpse.<sup>12</sup> However, the major emphasis in the text is placed on Fiona and Ferdinand: the two unearthened skeletons that move through time and space and compel the living to remember – and forget. What can the reader make of the curious tale of Fiona and Ferdinand, these crumbling, mysterious skeletons that the narrator and Franz fail to reassemble, and that are found, decades later, curiously hidden away in old Bachmaier's chest? With these bodies, Haslinger gives his audience yet another iteration of the body-as-place. Putting aside the actual identity of the skeletons (itself an unresolved mystery), Fiona and Ferdinand re-emphasize Haslinger's preoccupation with the body and its placement as sites of meaning. The skeleton as object is more than just an inanimate structure; it is an artifact that encourages, even demands, memory. Zerubavel argues that such objects, which he calls "relics," "allow us to live in the present while [we] at the same time literally 'cling' to the past" (43), suggesting that the object transcends time and space and brings whoever possesses it, by virtue of its materiality, closer to the past. Indeed, the skeletons in "Fiona und Ferdinand" "outlive" several of the characters in the story and exist beyond time as they appear to several generations – Frau Gutwenger, Old Bachmaier, and the narrator – and evoke memories and revelations in each of them.

Like so many of the bodies in Haslinger's story, the skeletons are also a site of conflict, compelling the narrator to wonder about the past as they frustrate his access to it. Despite washing the skeletons repeatedly after unearthing them in the Bachmaiers' field, the narrator declares that the bones "waren einfach nicht weiß zu kriegen," which spurs him to paint them white instead (46).<sup>13</sup> The bones' refusal to become clean implicates the boys in the practices

12 The rotting hole in Old Bachmaier's throat can also be read parallel to the hole in Frau Gutwenger's attic roof, thus further linking him (in)directly with the sole witness to Elisabeth Graf's murder.

13 As a college student, Rupert Kramer, protagonist of *Das Vaterspiel*, helps his girlfriend

of revisionist history as they quite literally whitewash evidence. They name the skeletons Fiona and Ferdinand after two fictional unrequited lovers of their own invention, and attempt to physically reconstruct them:

wir fanden auf der hobelbank des alten bachmaier einen drillbohrer und begannen damit, die beckenteile und schädel zu durchlöchern und draht durchzustecken, aber das wollte uns nicht gelingen. die knochen waren verfault. sie zerbröselten. die geschichte, die wir uns ausgedacht hatten, funktionierte nicht. die beiden ließen sich von uns nicht erlösen. (47)

Attempts to make the skeletons whole are foiled as the bones crumble between the children's fingers. The unsuccessful reconstruction of Fiona and Ferdinand in the narrator's boyhood parallels his failed attempt to reassemble the mystery of Elisabeth Graf's murder when he is an adult. Moreover, the futility of restoring the disintegrating bones represents the tension between the boys' invented love story and the reality of the rape and murder that actually occurred. Zerubavel writes, "instead of actually replacing the other, [past and present] are viewed as parts of an integrated whole" (37). In present narrative time, the narrator's childhood comes full circle within his mother's irresolvable circular story and his cabbage pressing. His homecoming compels him to "peel the onion" – to borrow from Grass – and reveal the striations of the past there.

Further, the skeleton in literature evokes the notion of *memento mori*, and indeed, the preoccupation in "Fiona und Ferdinand" with decay, death, and memory is also aligned, though inversely, with the dual themes of mortality and transience that *memento mori* represents. The introspective nature of *memento mori* is complicated by the text's stubborn refusal to examine memory or reflect on mortality. Despite supposed evidence indicting the Bachmaier brothers in several murders, neither the narrator, nor Haslinger's audience, ever really achieves any clarity as to the identity of the skeletons, their killer(s), or the perpetrator(s) who raped and murdered Elisabeth Graf. Indeed, the surfacing of the skeletons only deepens the townspeople's conviction to uphold the constructed narrative of innocence for Bachmaier, despite prevalent communal suspicions to the contrary. The final sentences of Haslinger's story re-emphasize his concern with the tenuousness of collective memory. Stopping at the village cemetery on his way out of town, the narrator spots a small pile of dirt ("wie das grab eines babys") and "ritzte fiona & ferdinand in

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Mimi – who will later implicate him in a decades-old secret in Long Island – paint her apartment bedroom. He finds that her walls are smeared with an unidentifiable brown substance, the origin or identity of which cannot be determined. Mimi insists on painting everything white – "Alles weiß, sagte sie. Ich werde alles weiß ausmalen" (181) – which echoes the subsequent whitewashing of her family's criminal history in the novel.

den sand. als ich schon im auto saß und gestartet hatte, stieg ich noch einmal aus und lief zurück. ich löschte mit den schuhsolen die buchstaben wieder aus" (64). After christening the skeletons "Fiona und Ferdinand" in his childhood, the adult narrator makes a decisive gesture to erase the names from memory altogether. The meaning of this deletion, however, is not apparent to the reader. It might be the narrator's acceptance of defeat in light of his mother's story, conceding that he'll never really know what happened in Bachmaier's field. Alternatively, he might snuff out the names of Fiona and Ferdinand in spontaneous frustration. Whatever the reason, the moment is purposefully ambiguous. Haslinger exposes in this, and several other of his texts, traditions of forgetting, while encouraging dialogues that compel the audience to revisit their own private and collective narratives.

## **5. No Room to Remember**

There are many opportunities for remembering and revelation in "Fiona und Ferdinand," but the biggest challenge to the realization of these moments is the text's preoccupation with forgetting and denial. The more the narrator asks about the past, the farther away he moves from an understanding of it. Moreover, remembering in "Fiona und Ferdinand" is a matter of the personal within the collective. Zerubavel talks about learning to remember in a "socially acceptable manner" that is "governed by unmistakably social norms of remembrance that tell us what we should remember and what we should essentially forget" (5). Like Winter's notion of "officially sanctioned memory," he suggests that "entire communities, and not just individuals, remember the past" (2). This is precisely the kind of memory that governs "Fiona und Ferdinand": Frau Gutwenger's narrative, while damning, is rejected in favor of the accepted version of memory constructed to maintain peace in the village (56). Haslinger entices the reader by providing several clues which point to the Bachmaier brothers as murderers of Elisabeth Graf and the two found skeletons, only to leave the crimes unsolved, and the reader with a nagging sense of irresolution and curiosity that mirrors the narrator's own inquisitiveness. Her story at its end, mother acknowledges the likelihood of Frau Gutwenger's eyewitness testimony, an account that was otherwise the object of sustained skepticism in the story:

vielleicht ist es gut, dass der franz nicht weiß, wie es wirklich war.  
moment, sagte ich. du glaubst doch nicht, dass es die bachmaier-brüder  
getan haben? und was ist dann mit den beiden skeletten?  
irgendwoher mussten die bachmaier-brüder ja die russischen uniformen  
haben.

du meinst, sie haben sie umgebracht?  
die sind plötzlich so fromm geworden, das hat nicht zu ihnen gepasst. und  
was die elisabeth gerufen hat: ich habe euch doch nichts getan. ruft man so  
etwas russen nach, die einen gerade vergewaltigt haben?  
und da schickst du mich zum franz? fragte ich.  
wir wissen nicht, wie es wirklich war, und die gutwengerin weiß es auch  
nicht. aber sie soll wieder ihren frieden haben. (63)

Mother's reasoning recalls the narrator's directionless cabbage-stomping. Despite her story, he is no closer to accessing the truth than he was when he arrived. The narrator's mother speaks twice in "Fiona und Ferdinand" about restoring *Frieden* in her community at the expense of uncovering larger truths about criminality in its past, an exercise in self-exploration too weighty for her to undertake. Herman identifies the active role one assumes when remembering on behalf of victims:

It is very tempting to take the side of the perpetrator. All the perpetrator asks is that the bystander do nothing. He appeals to the universal desire to see, hear, and speak no evil. The victim, on the contrary, asks the bystander to share the burden of pain. The victim demands action, engagement, and remembering. [...] War and victims are something the community wants to forget; a veil of oblivion is drawn over everything painful and unpleasant. We find the two sides face to face; on one side the victims who perhaps wish to forget but cannot, and on the other all those with strong, often unconscious motives who very intensely both wish to forget and succeed in doing so. (7–8)

She goes on to suggest that "traumatized people go to great lengths" to avoid reliving a traumatic experience because it "provokes such intense emotional distress" (42). Such is the case in "Fiona und Ferdinand," where the community actively promotes a culture of forgetting.<sup>14</sup> Further, Haslinger shows how this collective amnesia only leads to continued repetitions of the past. When Franz refuses the narrator's suggestion to meet and reconcile with Frau Gutwenger, his wife Frieda declares that, "solange du nicht zur gutwen-

14 Conversely, Haslinger's *Phi Phi Island: ein Bericht* (2007) represents the potential for language to function as a medium by which trauma is processed. Haslinger and his family were vacationing on Koh Phi Phi when the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami struck, devastating the region and killing hundreds of thousands. *Phi Phi Island* was written by Haslinger with contributions by his children; the collective product constitutes a work of profound reflection and memory. Indeed, the text itself bears traces of the enduring imprint made by the tsunami on Haslinger's subsequent daily life: a tendon was injured in his little finger during the disaster, rendering him unable to easily access the shift key on his computer. The story is thus written entirely in lower case – Haslinger foregoes the German-language convention of capitalizing all nouns – and reading the text this way is to be constantly reminded of the traumatic episode Haslinger survived.

gerin gehst, wird diese geschichte im dorf weitererzählt werden" (61). She underscores the potency of storytelling, characterizing it as an unstoppable process that is tied up with *Geschichte* in every sense of the word – as history and story alike. Franz' response, "dann wird die geschichte halt weitererzählt" (61) in turn uses the double meaning of *Geschichte* to make a point: the telling of stories is a cyclical – and, as this story demonstrates, circular – act, and the uncertainty of his father's guilt endures for perpetuity. Further, *Geschichte* as history is reproduced ad infinitum by these enduring traditions of silence. Frieda quips, "dann machen wir einen film daraus. ich spiele die graf-tochter, und du bringst mich um" (61). In the updated film version of Elisabeth Graf's murder, Franz plays the role of his own (probably murderous) father, and time and space are eclipsed, rendering father and son as one in the same person. Roth proposes a way out from these cycles: "an escape from patterns of suffering is often dependent on recognizing them as part of one's history ... recognizing and giving voice to one's suffering is a necessary stage in moving past that suffering" (11). In order for suffering to be resolved, it must be recognized. But even this most basic acknowledgment eludes "Fiona und Ferdinand." Among other victims, Elisabeth Graf is trapped inside the dual traditions of denial and sanctioned memory. When the narrator strikes "Fiona and Ferdinand" from the cemetery soil, he also abandons the feasible hope of laying Elisabeth's memory to rest. And the audience is left, as is so often the case following the reading of a text by Haslinger, with a combined sense of hopelessness and frustration vis-à-vis *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* in this Austrian landscape.<sup>15</sup>

## 6. Conclusion

In a review of "Fiona und Ferdinand," Kristina Werndl calls Haslinger "ein Archäologe der Untaten der österreichischen Zwischen- und Nachkriegszeit." Like Winter, Zerubavel, Massey, and others, she imagines the text, and the landscape discussed therein, as spatial palimpsests, layers of trauma and memory with Haslinger as the archaeologist to excavate them. Haslinger penetrates the surface of postwar Austria, and re-erects the remains of what he finds there. He imagines spaces and places in several iterations: as the

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15 Haslinger's exploration of Austrian culpability, politics, and failure to adequately enact *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* is omnipresent in his works, but his essay collection *Politik der Gefühle: ein Essay über Österreich* (1987) confronts these issues directly via a consideration of language and rhetoric in the political sphere. For a further consideration of *Politik der Gefühle* and Haslinger's then-criticisms of Jörg Haider and the FPÖ, see Geoffrey Howes' "The Politics of Rhetoric in Some Recent Austrian Essays." *New German Critique*, No. 93, Austrian Writers Confront the Past (Autumn, 2004): 43–53.

geographical terrain of the countryside, in the lived space of the domestic interior, and as an experiential body, itself a traumatic landscape. The bodies in “Fiona und Ferdinand” can be codified twofold, as either the female body existing as- and within-space, or as skeletons, themselves rotted emblems of the dual practices of denial and forgetting that prevail in the story’s village setting. Irrespective of their expression, spaces in “Fiona und Ferdinand” are united by the struggles that occur upon them. In her own writings on memory, feminist scholar bell hooks indicated that, “our struggle is also a struggle of memory against forgetting” (Massey 171), and indeed, what Haslinger undertakes in “Fiona und Ferdinand” is a project that, while sidestepping explicit resolution, attempts to remember. Literary memoirs, according to Winter, are “acts of witnessing” (373) and storytellers “our essential guides to this uncanny landscape [of memory]” (388). Though the narrator – himself a proxy for Haslinger – undertakes a frustrating journey, he journeys nonetheless, both explicitly and implicitly. Haslinger, meanwhile, erasing the names “Fiona and Ferdinand” from the final page of his story, points to his own unresolved inquiries into memory. But the processes of exploration and remembering in his text are not futile. Werndl suggests that “Vergangenheit wird nicht bewältigt, aber beschrieben” in “Fiona und Ferdinand,” and in the end, this may be Haslinger’s point. Through his story, the audience bears witness to the transgressions contained within sites of conflict, and starts to dig up the past, uncovering specters of memory.

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